Le Smithsonian S-4.5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Miscellaneous

the phrase: "This is natural." Children are not spaced, for normally a man resumes intercourse with his wife the second or third month after childbirth. Except for the drinking of coconut milk and salt, which is believed to be effective in preventing conception if taken before intercourse, contraceptives are not known to women, which means that pregnancies follow in rapid succession. Families are not too large, however, despite this, those numbering seven or eight children being rare, even in the hills. The reason for this is a high incidence of infant mortality, which is obvious despite the absence of vital statistics. Abortions are usually resorted to by young women, who sustain the operation done by the uncertain skill of an old woman, in the fear that bearing a child will later stand in the way of a desirable legal marriage. Some men, however, take the precaution of placing a grain of native salt on the tongue while having intercourse during an illicit affair, believing that this will be effective in preventing conception.

A childless woman first goes to a *vodun* priest, to have him determine by divination if a co-wife has not invoked magic against her. If her question receives an affirmative answer, she acquires a "counter-charm" to offset the effect of the other woman's magic. Should such a charm be ineffective, she would offer her prayers before the shrines of the saints and make pilgrimages to such sacred places as Saut d'Eau, there phrasing her petition to the Virgin in some manner such as the prayer overheard as a woman lighted a candle and held it in her hand before placing it on a sacred rock:

"Vièrge Miracles, Manman, voilà, depuis six ans depuis qui moins marié; moin apé vivre seul avec pauvre malhereux moin-a. Ça fait trois fois moin vini nan pié ou. Pas 'blié mandé moin fait ou, pour charité, moin ou petit pitite. Moin va minnin li ba ou. Moin apé parti, Manman, s' ou' pli, songé ça pitite m' mandé ou.—

3: Leyburn Z-4,5 (no date) 1966
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[p. 193]

XI

DOMESTIC LIFE OF THE PEASANTS

HAITI apparently has more women than men. This is not merely the casual impression of visitors, but a general conviction among local scholars and priests who know the country intimately. There is no census, of course, so that an investigator lacks means of confirming an unusual biological situation in which, it is said, there are five women to four men, in which many more girls than boys are born, and in which the death rate is higher for females than for males.

During slavery, more men than women were imported into the colony, but the slaughters of the insurrection and the revolution more than balanced the two sexes. The colonial census of 1790, probably inaccurate, showed 452,000 blacks and 28,000 affranchis who had some degree of Negro blood; a census of 1805, which certainly could not have been more than an estimate based on reports of plantation overseers and army officers, reported only 380,000 Haitians. This would indicate a staggering loss of 100,000 within fifteen years. Even with a reasonable juggling of the figures, it is obvious that deaths increased during the troubled years, and obviously males rather than females met their death on battlefields. Commentators on Haiti under Dessalines already speak of the preponderance of women. Other writers during the nineteenth century expressed the opinion that women outnumbered men, but the only figures offered were those in one parish for 1821–26—possibly atypical even if the figures are accurate—showing that 1,305 girls were born as compared with 1,209 boys.[1]

Certain physicians whose practice takes them into country districts and also certain priests have stated their belief that the number of females born exceeds the number of males. Although these men are in a good position to judge, the statement remains an opinion not yet validated by statistics; if it should prove true, it would be an extraordinary biological freak.[2] Another observation must be set

1. These are the figures of Charles Mackenzie, *Notes on Hayti*, II, 118.

2. One physician thinks that the rate would be as high as five girls to three boys in a few parishes; and a priest recounts his experiences in baptizing girls named "Assez-fille" (Girls-enough), so called by their parents to indicate to deity that the next child should by rights be a boy. Professional observations such as these merely corroborate the general opinion as to the excess of females in the population.

3: Leyburn Z-4,5 (no date) 1966
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Another observation must be set

588 162 alongside this professional testimony: many men, both aristocrats and common folk, have more than one placée, yet there seem to be enough women for Haitian men.

595 625 Although peasants in Haiti are rarely married by formal ceremony, the family is a dominant characteristic of peasant life. This sums up the domestic situation among the masses.

When it is recalled that the Negro, from the time he was taken from Africa on slave ships, had almost no experience of the European tradition of conventional marriage, one has a partial explanation of the absence of peasant weddings. For the rest the people are realists, agreeing that a man should have as many women as he needs to carry on the economy of his land holdings; the law forbids polygamy, but exerts no control over plural unions which are entered without formal ceremony. It has therefore come to be regularly accepted in the mores that practical need should determine the number of women to one man. If a peasant increases his land holdings, if he buys or inherits a second farm on the other side of the mountain, it is only common sense for him to take a second woman, raise a family by her, and thus have an overseer and a labor supply resident on each of his properties. Everyone in the community knows what women belong to what man, and custom strongly taboos any tampering with another man's spouses.

162 581 ● 163 Only the Catholic Church has statistics to reveal the infrequency of marriages among the masses. The story was the same a century ago as now. In the important parish of Gonaïves in 1825 the proportion of marriages to births was as 1 to 62; in 1826 they were as 1 to 54.[1] Both figures include marriages and births among the élite, and Gonaïves is a town: in the countryside the proportion of marriages would be much lower. The parish priest of Carrefours, which numbers about a thousand households, stated that in 1936 there had been only ten marriages among his six or eight thousand parishioners. [848] Another parish priest estimated that only one half of one per cent of the baptisms performed were of children born to parents legally married. Even in the parish of Pétionville, home of many élite, a priest estimates that less than one child in five is born to married parents. 595 A century ago a commandant at Léogane, speaking of a high army officer, said, "He is my brother-in-law: I live with his sister." Near Port-au-Prince lived a rural police captain with six placage

1. Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, II, 119–120.

spouses,